

March 14, 2016

Dear Co-Chairman Coleman, Co-Chairman Tong and members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am writing in support of H.B. 5054, a bill that would add important protections for Connecticut victims of domestic violence.

On May 7, 2014, Lori Jackson Gellatly was shot and killed by her estranged husband, Scott Gellatly, in her parent's Oxford, CT home. Months before the attack, Lori had left Scott and moved in with her parents, taking their 18-month old twins with her.<sup>1</sup> Just weeks before the shooting, Lori was granted a temporary restraining order against Scott, telling the court that she feared for her safety and that of her children because Scott was violent and mentally ill.<sup>2</sup> She was waiting for the court hearing on her application for a permanent restraining order at the time of her murder.<sup>3</sup> After breaking into her parent's home, Scott shot Lori four times in the head and torso and also shot Lori's mother in the head, severely damaging her eye.<sup>4</sup> He also shot the family dog.<sup>5</sup> Scott Gellatly was convicted for Lori's murder and in November 2015 and was sentenced to 45 years in prison.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, Lori's story is not unique. Women in the United States face unparalleled risks of gun violence: Five women are murdered with a gun each day in the United States.<sup>7</sup> In many instances, these are not random acts of violence, but often occur in the context of violent intimate partner relationships. Nationally, according to data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, between 2003 and 2012, a third of the women murdered in the U.S. were killed by an intimate partner.<sup>8</sup> This was also true in Connecticut: during the same period 41 percent of Connecticut women murdered were killed by an intimate partner.<sup>9</sup>

A key driver of fatal violence against women is access to guns. Women in the U.S. are 500 percent more likely to be murdered by an intimate partner when a gun is present in a home where there is a history of domestic violence.<sup>10</sup> Access to guns are a clear factor in domestic violence-related homicides of women in Connecticut: 41 percent of women murdered by an intimate partner in the state between 2003 and 2012 were killed with a gun.<sup>11</sup>

The Connecticut legislature has previously recognized this increased risk presented by domestic abusers with guns and has enacted a number of strong laws to prevent these dangerous individuals from having easy access to guns. Notably, the state has enacted strong laws to prohibit individuals who have been convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence crimes or who are subject to permanent domestic violence restraining orders from buying and possessing guns.<sup>12</sup> However, a serious gap in the law remains that leaves many women vulnerable to lethal violence at the hands of abusers at precisely the time when they face the greatest risk. As was tragically demonstrated in the murder of Lori Jackson Gellatly, the period immediately after the issuance of a temporary restraining order is often one of the most dangerous for victims in abusive relationships. When an abuser learns that their victim has filed a restraining order against them, they often become angry and can sometimes resort to extreme behavior—including lethal violence.<sup>13</sup> The heightened risk presented in the immediate aftermath of service of an order of protection was likewise highlighted in the February 25, 2015 shooting in Hesston, Kansas that killed three and wounded 14. While that case is still under investigation and all of the facts are not yet available, we do know that this massacre began shortly after the shooter was served

with a restraining order filed by his former girlfriend.<sup>14</sup>

H.B. 5054 would close this remaining gap in Connecticut law and ensure that domestic abusers do not continue to have access to guns during this period of heightened risk after the issuance of a temporary restraining order. This bill would prohibit individuals subject to a temporary restraining order from possessing guns only for the duration of that order—generally, a period of 14 days pending a full hearing on an application for a permanent restraining order. This bill would help protect women and families from fatal gun violence during this extremely dangerous intervening period before a court has had an opportunity to issue a final order of protection. Similar laws have been enacted in a number of other states—including Massachusetts, California, Illinois, Texas and West Virginia—and Connecticut now has an opportunity with this bill to help prevent more tragic domestic violence homicides.

Respectfully,

Chelsea Parsons  
Vice President, Guns and Crime Policy

---

<sup>1</sup> Amanda Cude, "Gellatly death highlights gaps in system," *Connecticut Post*, May 11, 2014, available at <http://www.ctpost.com/local/article/Gellatly-death-highlights-gaps-in-system-5469075.php>.

<sup>2</sup> "Oxford Man Sentenced to 45 Years for Wife's Murder," *NBC Connecticut*, November 17, 2015, available at <http://www.nbcconnecticut.com/news/local/Oxford-Man-to-Be-Sentenced-in-Wifes-Murder-351006671.html>; Susan Haigh, "Family of slain Oxford woman, Lori Gellatly, wants new gun law," *New Haven Register*, June 23, 2014, available at <http://www.nhregister.com/general-news/20140623/family-of-slain-oxford-woman-lori-gellatly-wants-new-gun-law>.

<sup>3</sup> Elaine Griffin, "Scott Gellatly Gets 45 Years For Killing Wife," *Hartford Courant*, November 17, 2015, available at <http://www.courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-scott-gellatly-to-be-sentenced-20151117-story.html>; "Oxford Man Sentenced to 45 Years for Wife's Murder."; Susan Haigh, "Family of slain Oxford woman, Lori Gellatly, wants new gun law."

<sup>4</sup> Elaine Griffin, "Scott Gellatly Gets 45 Years For Killing Wife."

<sup>5</sup> Amanda Cude, "Gellatly death highlights gaps in system."

<sup>6</sup> Elaine Griffin, "Scott Gellatly Gets 45 Years For Killing Wife."

<sup>7</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "WISQARS™ (Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System) Fatal Injury Reports," available at [http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal\\_injury\\_reports.html](http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal_injury_reports.html).

<sup>8</sup> Chelsea Parsons and Arkadi Gerney, *Women Under the Gun* (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2014), available at <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/GunsDomesticViolencereport.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> J.C. Campbell and others, "Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results from a Multistate Case Control Study," *American Journal of Public Health* 93 (7) (2003): 1089–1097.

<sup>11</sup> Chelsea Parsons and Arkadi Gerney, *Women Under the Gun*.

<sup>12</sup> Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, "Domestic Violence & Firearms in Connecticut," available at <http://smartgunlaws.org/domestic-violence-and-firearms-in-connecticut/>.

<sup>13</sup> J.C. Campbell and others, "Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results from a Multistate Case Control Study."

<sup>14</sup> Oliver Morrison and Amy Renee Leiker, "After Hesston shooting, some answers," *The Wichita Eagle*, February 26, 2016, available at <http://www.kansas.com/news/local/crime/article62621992.html>; Alan Yuhas, "Kansas shooting suspect was served protective order before killings," *The Guardian*, February 26, 2016, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/feb/26/kansas-factory-shooting-cedric-ford>.